

consent of the House to introduce a Bill and we shall ask the Opposition strictly to agree to respect the rights devolved to us by way of honest negotiations and provided by Standing Orders which were agreed upon by all the Members of this House. Following the discussions I had with the Hon. Member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) yesterday, I expect that the Members opposite will not agree to that unless I have been able to convince them to show some common sense. If they fail to agree, we shall not insist. I would not want to lower myself and prevent this House from sitting today on the grounds that this is an Opposition day. I shall not let my behaviour be influenced by the bell ringing tactics of the Opposition the way the Manitoba Conservatives let theirs be influenced by the Federal Progressive Conservatives. We shall simply refrain from introducing the Bill if there is not unanimous consent, but the people at large will know that this type of obstruction on the part of the Official Opposition is unworthy of a nation which takes pride in the fact that its people are free and that it sets a democratic example for the rest of the world. Whoever will have prevented us from having unanimous consent and who will continue to threaten to use these extreme measures will bear the responsibility for it. We shall see how the public will pass judgment on these facts; we shall see how the public will distinguish between the Progressive Conservative Party before and after Mulroney. Is the civility to which he refers less noisy than it was at the time of the bell ringing for the energy Bill three years ago? Do the bells we have heard these last three days show a change of spirit or attitude on the part of the Progressive Conservative Party in the House? It is unfortunate that the Leader of the Official Opposition is not here at this moment. He is never here and even when he is, he very seldom has any question to ask. He is the new Quiet Man, the "Mr. Muffler" of Canadian politics.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to go on much longer, but Canadians have a right to our respect. They have the right to see their Parliament and their Members of Parliament debate issues in the House. As Members of Parliament, we have no right to prevent debate from proceeding by letting the division bells ring. The Progressive Conservative Party started this new fad of paralyzing debate, infringing on our freedom of speech, and preventing Members of Parliament from passing legislation. One would have hoped that, with the new Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, there would have been a change in attitude, so that Canadians would no longer have to put up with these unfortunate incidents. However, that is not the case, and the public can judge for itself that in the final instance, the Members opposite are the same ones who let the bells ring for sixteen days during the energy debate. They are the ones who undermined Parliament's credibility, who took this institution hostage, and who now, under the leadership of the new Member for Central Nova (Mr. Mulroney), have not changed one bit. It is the same clique, the same old gang of obstructionists that is preventing Parliament from functioning, and, Mr. Speaker I say this is very unfortunate, and I am certainly not convinced that the change in leadership on the Progressive Conservative side was a change for the better. On

#### *Division Bells Procedure*

the contrary, it has become a leadership that is silent on policy and very vocal through its use of the division bells. It is both regrettable and intolerable.

Mr. Speaker, you said that, pending adoption of a Standing Order, the Chair would let itself be guided by common sense. About two weeks ago, and this is my third example, when the bells rang somewhat longer than expected because of the weather, the Chair consulted with Party representatives and found out, at least as far as we were concerned, that it was true the weather was bad in eastern Quebec, that there was fog in the Maritimes and that weather conditions would have prevented Hon. Members from exercising their sacred right to vote in the House. I think it is a matter of common sense. When the division bells ring for such reasons, the Chair having consulted with Members on both sides of the House, it seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that it is only common sense and only logical, and that the public is prepared to accept this.

However, with respect to the two most recent examples, the Manitoba issue and the energy legislation bell-ringing incident three and a half years ago, you have every right to try to convince the Parties to reach an agreement so that you will have guidelines to follow and avoid finding yourself too often in situations where you might appear to favour one side over the other.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, I hope that parliamentarians will continue to seek a solution and work together to find a way out. I am prepared to sit down with you and discuss the question, as you have suggested, along with the Opposition spokesmen if they are interested—or without them—with a view to improving the situation. However, until such time as we do settle the issue, surely we ought to rely on common sense. We agree with you and, as far as we are concerned, we want to impress upon you that we have never considered nor do we consider now resorting to bell-ringing tactics. Still, we are not going to let the Opposition continue to breach freedom in Canada by playing bell games as it has been doing so shamefully both here and in the Manitoba Legislature.

● (1230)

[*English*]

**Hon. Erik Nielsen (Yukon):** Mr. Speaker, we, of course, will want to study your very thoughtful reflections that were obviously given a great degree of care in preparation. Certainly, I for one would be very happy to meet with you, if I took it from your remarks that there is a suggestion that we do so. In the meantime, because the Chair raised the precedents, allow me to say that the manner in which the Government House Leader has referred to the precedents is very saddening to me. What he has done is that not once, not twice, but three times today he has attempted to use this occasion to use French-English rights in this country as an instrument of division rather than one of unity.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!